

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AGR-05 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04

STR-04 TRSE-00 CIEP-01 FRB-03 /087 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8896

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 4948

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

REF BOGOTA 4900

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. THE REMOVAL OF GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR, EARLY WEDNESDAY MORNING, WHILE NOT ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED, WAS SURPRISING BY REASON OF THE PRECIPITATE NATURE OF THE ACTION. THE GENERAL, ALTHOUGH KNOWN TO BE AT ODDS WITH DEFENSE MINISTER VARON AND PERHAPS LESS THAN ENTHUSIASTIC IN HIS SUPPORT OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ, HAD BEEN CIRCUMSPECT IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS. HIS DEPARTURE, FOLLOWING BY TWO WEEKS THAT OF GENERAL PUYANA, HAS PUT AN FXD, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, TO THE MOST VISIBLDZASPECTS OF THE STRAINED RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE MILITARY.
MOST OBSERVERS AGREED THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF A CRISIS IS NOW PAST. THUS ON THURSDAY (CORPUS CHRISTI DAY) BOGOTANOS BEGAN THEIR FOUR-DAY WEEKEND IN RELATIVELY GOOD SPIRITS. END SUMMARY

2. TENSION OVER ARMY CHANGES SUBSIDES.

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THE GENERAL TENSION AND CONFUSION PRODUCED BY THE

PRECIPITATE REMOVAL OF GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR AS ARMY COMMANDER IN THE EARLY MORNING OF MAY 28 EASED CONSIDERABLY FOLLOWING A PRESS CONFERENCE BY VALENCIA LATER THAT SAME DAY. VALENCIA EXPLAINED TO REPORTERS DISPASSIONATELY AND IN DETAIL THE EVENTS WHICH PRODUCED HIS REMOVAL AND DENIED THAT A COUP HAD EVER BEEN CONSIDERED BY ANYONE IN THE ARMED FORCES. ACCORDING TO VALENCIA, FOLLOWING THE APPEARANCE EARLY IN THE WEEK OF PRESS REPORTS ABOUT A POSSIBLE COUP, VALENCIA AND OTHERS DRAFTED A COMMUNIQUE OF DENIAL, WHICH WAS THEN APPROVED BY DEFENSE MINISTER VARON. ON TUESDAY, CONCERNED BY FURTHER SUCH REPORTS, VALENCIA RESOLVED TO ISSUE A STATEMENT OF HIS OWN IN LINE WITH THE APPROVED COMMUNIQUE WHICH HAD NOT YET BEEN ISSUED. VALENCIA WAS NOT AWARE THAT MINISTER VARON, AFTER APPROVING THE COMMUNIQUE, HAD MADE FURTHER CHANGES IN IT. THE COMMUNIQUE AND THE VALENCIA STATEMENT APPEARED AT THE SAME TIME AND SEEMED TO CONFLICT, ALTHOUGH VALENCIA CLAIMED RATHER THAT THERE WAS A DIFFERENCE IN "FOCUS". THE AMENDED COMMUNIQUE CONTAINED LANGUAGE WHICH ASCRIBED THE FORCED RETIREMENT OF GENERAL PUYANA AND LT COLONEL JIMENEZ TO "INDISCIPLINE". IN HIS STATEMENT, VALENCIA WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO DEFEND THE LOYALTY AND INTEGRITY OF THE TWO OFFICERS. IN VIEW OF THIS APPARENT CONFLICT, VALENCIA SAID, PRESIDENT LOPEZ CHOSE TO EXERCISE HIS PREROGATIVE AND SEPARATE HIM FROM THE SERVICE. VALENCIA APPEALED TO ALL OFFICERS TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE AND ACCEPT DECISIONS OF SUPERIORS IN LINE WITH THE TRADITION OF THE COUNTRY AND THE ARMY. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH TENSION HAS ABATED CONSIDERABLY, RESENTMENT AND GRUDGES WILL CONTINUE IN SOME MILITARY CIRCLES AGAINST THE FACTION LED BY DEFENSE MINISTER VARON. THE MANNER OF THESE DISMISSALS HAS ALSO CALLED INTO QUESTION PRESIDENT LOPEZ'S MANAGEMENT OF THIS MATTER, IN WHICH WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN HANDLED AS AN INTERNAL DISCIPLINARY PROBLEM WAS BLOWN UP ALMOST TO THE APPEARANCE OF AN INSTITUTIONAL CRISIS. EVEN LIBERAL PARTY EL TIEMPO, SOMETIMES SLAVISHLY PRO-LOPEZ, GENTLY CHIDED LOPEZ IN A MAY 29 EDITORIAL FOR NOT PROCEEDING WITH MORE DISCRETION.

3. PRESIDENT LOPEZ RWSOLVES LATEST MINISTERIAL AND GOVERNOR
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"CRISES". PRESIDENT LOPEZ RESOLVED TWO ALLEGED "CRISES" INVOLVING MINISTERS AND GOVERNORS DURING THE WEEK. RECENTLY MINISTER OF JUSTICE SANTOFIMIO AND LABOR MINISTER DE CROVO HAD ENGAGED IN SHARP VERBAL ATTACKS AGAINST THE COURT SYSTEM AND JUDGES, AND BUSINESSMEN, RESPECTIVELY. PRESIDENT LOPEZ IN A LETTER TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDUSTRIALISTS (ANDI) MAY 23, SAID THAT HE WOULD "ADMONISH ANY PUBLIC OFFICIAL WHO USES INAPPROPRIATE

LANGUAGE IN REFERRING TO INDIVIDUALS OR ASSOCIATIONS". NEITHER MINISTER COULD LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE, HOWEVER. SANTOFIMIO DESCRIBED HIS ATTACKS ON THE JUDGES AS "INTELLECTUAL THOUGHT" WHILE THE LABOR MINISTER SAID THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR INDIVIDUALS TO REACT TO THE SUBSTANCE OF WHAT WAS SAID RATHER THAN TO THE WORDS, OBVIOUSLY REFERRING TO THE REACTION OF ANDI REPRESENTATIVES TO HER EXCESSIVE LANGUAGE IN A MEETING THE PREVIOUS WEEK (BOGOTA 4784). NEVERTHELESS, LOPEZ PROBLEMS WITH THESE TWO MINISTERS SHOULD NOT BE TOO DIFFICULT DURING THE NEXT MONTH. HE HAS REQUESTED AN OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE BEHAVIOR OF SANTOFIMIO, WHICH WILL PROBABLY LAST SUFFICIENTLY LONG TO ALLOW THE MINISTER TO REMAIN IN OFFICE UNTIL JULY, WHEN A NUMBER OF CABINET CHANGES MAY BE MADE. SANTOFIMIO HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION TO RESIGN ON JULY 10 IN ORDER TO RETURN TO THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES WHERE HE HOPES TO BE ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THAT BODY FOR THE YEAR BEGINNING JULY 20. MINISTER OF LABOR DE CROVO, MEANWHILE, DEPARTS FOR GENEVA MAY 31 WHERE SHE WILL ATTEND A ONE-MONTH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION.

4. PRESIDENT LOPEZ ALSO TOOK CARE OF ANOTHER TWO-WEEK OLD "CRISIS" BY ANNOUNCING MAY 28 THE APPOINTMENT OF THREE NEW GOVERNORS FOR THE DEPARTMENTS OF ATLANTIC, BOLIVAR, AND CESAR. FOR THE ATLANTIC, LOPEZ NAMED RAFAEL MALDONADO, A LIBERAL, TO HIS FIRST IMPORTANT PUBLIC POSITION REPLACING THE CONSERVATIVE ROBERTO GEULEIN, WHO HAD RESIGNED IN PART BECAUSE OF LIBERAL PARTY ANTAGONISMS AND ALSO BECAUSE THE PROBLEMS IN THAT DEPARTMENT, IN HIS OPINION, ARE INSOLUBLE. HE WILL RETURN TO THE SENATE. IN A SURPRISE MOVE, LOPEZ REPLACED HIS OLD REVOLUTIONARY LIBERAL MOVEMENT (MRL) ALLY, ALVARO ESCALLON, WITH A CONSERVATIVE, NICOLAS DEL CASTILLO. DEL CASTILLO WAS DIRECTOR OF THE TOURIST CORPORATION UNDER CONFIDENTIAL

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FORMER PRESIDENT PASTRANA, AND IS CURRENTLY DIRECTOR OF THE HOTEL CORPORATION. HE HAS BEEN AN ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTER OF PROMOTING TOURISM IN CARTAGENA. FINALLY, LOPEZ NAMED SENATOR ALFONSO ARAUJO AS GOVERNOR OF CESAR. ARAUJO SERVED AS GOVERNOR OF THIS DEPARTMENT IN 1968. AT THAT TIME HE REPLACED PRESIDENT LOPEZ. CESAR HAS SEEN CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC PROTEST AND VIOLENCE DURING THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. ARUAJO REPLACES GUILLERMO BAUTE, ALSO A LIBERAL. WHILE THE "CRISES" HAVE THUS BEEN RESOLVED, IT IS EXPECTED THAT YET ANOTHER WILL OCCUR IN JULY, WHEN IT IS NORMAL FOR COLOMBIAN PRESIDENTS TO MAKE CABINET CHANGES. IN THE WAY OF COLOMBIAN POLITICS, ALL SUCH OCCURRENCES ARE LABELED "CRISES".

5. NEW TEXTILE AGREEMENT CONCLUDED. ON MAY 28 THE US AND COLOMBIA EXCHANGED NOTES CREATING A NEW THREE-YEAR

MULTI-FIBER TEXTILE AGREEMENT TO REPLACE THE COTTON
AGREEMENT WHICH EXPIRES ON JUNE 30, 1975 (BOGOTA 4898).
ACHIEVEMENT OF AN ARRANGEMENT SATISFACTORY TO BOTH SIDES
REQUIRED THREE SEPARATE NEGOTIATING SESSIONS SPREAD
OVER A PERIOD OF FIVE MONTHS. IN HIS REMARKS
AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY DEVELOPMENT MINISTER JORGE
RAMIREZ EXPRESSED GREAT SATISFACTION THAT AN AGREEMENT
HAD FINALLY BEEN REACHED AND HIGHLY COMPLIMENTED THE
US NEGOTIATORS ON THEIR STYLE IN WHAT WHERE SOMETIMES
VERY TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES. GIVEN THE KEY POSITION OF THE
TEXTILE SECTOR IN COLOMBIAN INDUSTRY THE AGREEMENT REMOVED
WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN A HIGHLY ABRASIVE ISSUE FROM U.S.-
COLOMBIAN RELATIONS.

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